SightlessKombat is the May 2020 Xbox Ambassador of the Month!

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Introducing May 2020’s Xbox Ambassador of the Month – SightlessKombat!

Xbox Ambassadors, put your hands together for our newest Xbox Ambassador of the Month – SightlessKombat! SightlessKombat has been a member of our community going all the way back to Season 4. For those of you not already familiar with him and his work, SightlessKombat is a gamer without sight and accessibility consultant who is constantly pushing the gaming industry to create better experiences for gamers like him. Read on below to learn more about SightlessKombat, and tell him congratulations when you get a chance!

Q&A With SightlessKombat

How did gaming become one of your passions?

Though I was introduced to gaming from a very young age and through various formats, I think it really became a passion much later when I got an original Xbox One and was able to start easily fighting against other players in Killer instinct. Yes, I'd played fighting games and the like many years before, but being able to be directly involved with the community for KI, including playing with such a wide-ranging group of differently skilled individuals was a real turning point. Couple that with the fact that Narrator (the Xbox One's built-in screen reader for the console interface) released that same year and that pretty much set me on the path to becoming the accessibility consultant I am now, though I didn't know it then of course.

What is your most positive gaming experience?

I've had so many positive gaming experiences over the years, but a recent one was being able to set up and play Horde in Gears 5 for the first time whilst reviewing the title before launch… and actually hit my shots

consistently thanks to accessibility options. Though Gears 5 may not be a perfect example of how to implement accessibility, with important options as a gamer without sight being locked to beginner only for instance, it still stands today as a good example to work with and improve upon. It's great that I can say to sighted players "I'm a gamer without sight, watch me hit these several headshots in a row as Fahz, a sniper". In Gears Of War 4, that would've been pretty much impossible. However, with the rise of accessibility in recent years, even though progress is a little slower than I'd like, I'm getting much more value for money out of any game that allows me to achieve more even as a gamer without sight.

What is your favorite type of game to play, and how do you share your love of gaming with others?

My favourite genre of game is probably shooters or action games, though fighters of course would be a close second just because most of them are playable to varying degrees without sight. I share my love of gaming with others through my livestreams on Mixer and through my YouTube videos, as well as playing alongside friends and other players off-stream and showing just how everything works from my perspective. A lot of the time, most people don't even consider that a gamer without sight would even want to play a video game, let alone be able to do well or get enjoyment out of what is normally considered as a visual medium. It's great to be able to show first-hand that, with the right elements in place, gaming can (and should) be enjoyable by everyone.

What is a healthy community and what do you do to contribute to it?

A healthy community is one that encourages positivity and allows for easy integration. That last part can mean different things to different people, but in my case, a healthy community allows me as a gamer without sight to feel like I belong to a medium that, at times, frustrates me just because I don't have sight to start with. Without the encouragement and assistance of numerous others, for instance, I wouldn't have been able to complete the Gears or Halo franchises without getting local sighted assistance, which isn't ideal. Thanks to the Xbox community, I've been able to play so many games that otherwise I wouldn't have been able to complete or progress in and for that I can't thank all those who've assisted me enough.

As for how I contribute to a healthy community, I encourage discussion on accessibility, but I also just hang around in streams I enjoy, say hi and engage where I can, keeping the conversation positive and (hopefully) entertaining. Opening gamers' eyes (pun intended) to a lack of accessibility is a good conversation starter but so is just keeping interaction going during a live stream, even if you have no idea what's going on.

How do you think online communities positively impact the lives of gamers?

With the world moving to an online format, when content is accessible, the positive impact cannot be understated. Being able to ask for assistance from gamers who are willing to offer their time to you (whether that's in a fighting game or as part of a team in a shooter to name two examples) is easier than ever, Allowing gamers without sight to enjoy a wide range of experiences they might've never thought possible, just like anyone else, as it should be.

What brought you to the Xbox Ambassadors Program, and what makes you stay?

I can't remember the exact details. I just happened to stumble across a reference to the Xbox Ambassadors program and, having never heard of it before, I looked a little further and decided to sign up. It was good to know that there was a positive set of gamers out there to engage with and be a part of, who all played on my primary platform of choice or at least had access to the same games as me, amongst other things.

As for what makes me stay, it's the sense of community. I may not be able to join in with the vast majority of the livestreams because of time differences, or the games because of a current lack of accessibility in the titles and modes featured in playdates, but knowing I'm a part of a greater whole along with so many other talented and helpful individuals is fantastic. Being able to collaborate with members of the XA community in games like Sea Of Thieves has also been highly enjoyable and has been a great way to meet like-minded individuals who are open to learning just how gaming works from differing perspectives such as mine.

Outside of gaming, how do you like to spend your time?

Outside of gaming, I like to socialize including, amongst other things, participating in sports and working as part of art projects. There have even been times within these projects where I've been able to weave my love of gaming back into my work, creating interesting overlaps. Additionally, I also enjoy listening to and playing music, ranging from classical to metal and numerous elements in between.

What inspired you to become an advocate for accessibility in gaming? Tell us a bit about the projects you work on.

My interest in becoming an accessibility consultant started when I got the idea to begin writing accessibility reviews. That itself stemmed from my frustrations with a lack of the kinds of information I wanted to know about the items I ended up reviewing. Take a review for a console, for instance.

Very rarely, if ever, do mainstream publications cover the unboxing process in a non-visual format, where all the specific ports are and what buttons activate certain functions for example. I realized this and started getting in contact with companies. It was a slow process when I first started, but I've had so many great opportunities since because of that idea.

As well as writing my reviews, live streaming and creating YouTube videos, I also founded the #TranscribingGames project which, in its simplest form, seeks to add audio description to video game footage. It goes deeper than that though, with text descriptions of characters, locations, enemies and items amongst other elements, as well as the footage with added audio description being components of the guides compiled by the community and myself. It's been a great project to work on so far and I look forward to putting out more content as time goes one.

What would you like to see happen next regarding accessibility in gaming?

If I've said it once I've said it a hundred times… I'm still waiting for developers to make titles that are fully playable from start to finish on the highest difficulty as a gamer without sight without needing sighted assistance at all. Some games, like Minecraft Dungeons and to a lesser extent Gears 5 have elements of the experience sorted (to varying degrees), but working out navigation of open worlds seems to be one of the big hurdles at present. Also, I'd really like to see non-western and smaller, independent developers start fully embracing accessibility.

As a general comment on the state of accessibility though, there are so many games that I would like to play and I might enjoy but are inaccessible without sight due to things like narrated menus and UI not being present. If subtitles can become standard in the vast majority of videogames, why can't accessibility features for gamers without sight?

Accessibility isn't perfect right now, but I can't wait to see where it goes in the rest of this year and beyond.

What's one thing that Xbox Ambassadors can do to make gaming more fun for other gamers without sight?

Spread the word on accessibility in video games. If you encounter a gamer without sight and they're having particular issues with a game, let the developers know that gamers without sight are trying their titles and what problems they're encountering as well. Signal boosting these conversations around video game accessibility is crucial, as it will hopefully encourage developers to embrace designing with accessibility in mind all the way through the development process and post-launch too. Raising awareness of

accessibility will allow those working in games to see that solving for one, in fact, can solve for many. For example, though subtitles primarily assist those with hearing loss of varying degrees, they're even useful in circumstances that you might not think about like having someone sleeping in the same room and not wanting to wake them. Same goes for features that aid gamers without sight, with narrated menus/UI also being useful for those gamers who might have trouble reading very small text that has become a frequent point of discussion.

What message do you have for the Xbox Ambassadors community?

Gaming should be a place where everyone can play, regardless of any apparent barriers, including disability. At a time like this, many people are turning to gaming as a means of escape or to connect socially amongst other reasons. Irrespective of the reason though, they should be made to feel welcome and comfortable. So far I've had nothing but positive experiences as an Xbox Ambassador, so let's keep that going. Just remember, when everybody plays, we all win.

Learn More

Want to learn more about SightlessKombat, his work as an accessibility consultant, and what it’s like to be a gamer without sight? You can find more of SightlessKombat’s awesome content and work at his website, on his YouTube channel, on his Twitch channel, and in spotlights just about everywhere. Say hello and congratulations to him when you get a chance, and stay tuned for more opportunities to get to know him better in the near future!